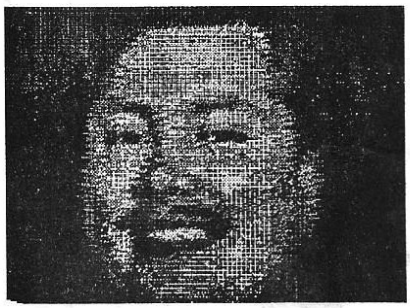
VANCOUVER ISLAND ST ASSOCIATION

vista

NEWSLETTER

ATARI 520ST AUGUST 1987 ATARI 1040ST



PRESIDENTS MESSAGE

Just like last month I like to talk about the formation of a Special Interest Group (SIG) and the Vista survey. The survey has been mailed to all members, but I have hardly had any returned. I can therefore not publish the results as promised. Please return the completed survey as soon as possible!

As I said in the last issue, I would like to conduct separate meetings for those persons who are interested in writing software or who are interested in developing hardware for the ST. Many of the software packages for the ST that exist today do not exploit the full power of GEM, the Graphics Environment Manager of ST. Such exploitation could lead to very user-friendly software. Topics that I would like to see covered include of course GEM/GEMDOS, programming languages,applications, programming techniques, hardware upgrades, and external hardware interfacing. The first meeting will take place tuesday August 18th from 7-10 pm at 920 Rowils Cr. in Langford. The first topic will be on GEM Windows, Dialog Boxes and Alert Boxes and choice of programming language for development. If you are interested please call me at 478-3075 and leave me your name and number.

Robert Fraser

EDITORIAL

In this issue, the topic is again Music. One of the reasons for this is that my understanding of the subject has vastly improved since the last time we featured it. An other reasons for featuring it again is that MIDI software for the ST has arrived on the market in abundance. The software is getting better, and more and more musicians and recording studios are using them. For example the keyboard department at Long & McQuade is using *Steinberg's music software* on their ST, Dave's Keyboard is using *Midisoft's Studio* on theirs, and Tempo Trend is using *The Fianal Cut* from Edmonton, to demonstrate to musicians the potential of the ST and their synthesizers.

It was just a matter of time before someone, other than Paradox with their MS-EM, would come out with an IBM emulator for the ST. Avant Garde Systems has done so and they call it *pc-ditto*. From all reports they seem to have succeeded. More about that, inside.

Our technical section is not ready yet, but should start in the next issue. The BBS that Jamie was going to start up has been put on hold for a while.

John Russow

Produced with Publishing Partner, and an Atari ST

SYNTHESIZERS

Synthesizers basically fall in to three categories, The analog, the digital and the sampler synthesizer.

The analog synthesizer produces sounds that are less crisp say than the digital synthesizer. As to which one sounds better, that is a hot contested issue amongst musicians. The *Casio CZ-101* is a good example of a low priced analog synthesizer. The *Yamaha DX-100* is a good example of an inexpensive digital synthesizer. On a sale you can buy either for around $500-$600.

Both the *Casio* and the *Yamaha* have MIDI in and out. *Yamaha* also has MIDI through, which comes in handy if you want to hook up a drum machine to your music setup. The *Casio* can reproduce four sounds when it is used with a sequencer, whereas the *Yamaha* can only reproduce one.

A sampler is entirely different in that it reproduces sounds that you the user produce directly. You produce the sound directly, via a microphone that you plug into the back of the sampler. For example, if you want the keyboard to sound like a flute, you play one note on the flute and the synthesizer samples that sound and stores it in memory. You can then save that sound onto a mini or micro disk for later use. Any sound is possible to reproduce from rattling keys to a full choir.

Samplers are also much more expensive. A *Roland S10* which is the low end model, you are lucky to find for under $2000. The *Roland S10* can playback four sounds, when used in conjunction with a sequencer.

I have been informed by *Tempo Trend* that they are comming to our meeting, so that you can see the different synthesizers and ask questions.

MIDI SOFTWARE

MIDI software fall into three main categories, and there is a fair degree of overlap between the types; the music players, sequencers and patch librarians. There are other categories but as of this writing there are no stand-alone music scoring or utilities programs for the ST, although several software manufaturers have promised some.

MUSIC PLAYER PROGRAMS

At the simplet level, a player program takes a data file containing musical information in the MIDI format and uses it to reproduce the original music on a MIDI instrument (typically a synthesizer). This is the digital equivalent of a jukebox. At higher levels comes the ability to enter musical data in steptime format along with non-music control events, such as changing the synthesizer's voice or adding portamento, sustain, and vibrato. Some of these programs offer song playback through the ST's internal monitor speaker as well as external MIDI instruments. For a player program, availablity of prerecorded music on ST disks or as BBS files is important unless you only want to encode your own music.

SEQUENCER PROGRAM

Sequencer programs are the next step beyond player programs. The simplest sequencers record real-time input of MIDI music and controller data; more complex versions allow for sophisticated editing and manipulation of the music and can hold up to 60 indepenent tracks. A sequencer is like a multi-track tape recorder and, in fact, most such programs use a tape recorder metaphor in the user interface.

A good sequencer program lets you edit music data much the same as you would edit text with a word processor, inserting or deleting passages and cutting and pasting repeated sections. A MIDI thru feaure is important

too, especially if you are using a remote master keyboard controller. You also need external synching if the song tempo is to be controlled by a drum machine. Depending on the MIDI controlllers used, some instruments may send too much information and clog the data stream. data filtering can selectively remove un-wanted data and eliminate this problem. Other useful features are time correction (to synch the real-time notes played with the desired time signature), monitor metronome to keep steady time while playing , and punch in/out to overdub and correct bad notes

LIBRARIAN PROGRAMS

A library management program is a repository for MIDI; it can be either free standing or integrated within patch editor software. A librarian stores the control parameter data to initialize synthesizer voicing, set drum machine patterns, and assign controller effects. Librarians can build composite files that contain system-exclusive data for each instrument to give the desired setup for a particular song. All you need to do is call up the apparopriate file; with the press of a button you're ready to play. This makes a good librarian program indispensable for a MIDI-based system in live performace.

NEW IBM EMULATOR

PC-ditto from Avant-Garde Systems is the new IBM emulator for the ST and it works fine. It requires a Colour monitor and can run on either a 520ST or a 1040. The retail price is $90US or $130CAN.

Pc-ditto enables you to run the most popular IBM software on your ST. The software taps the potential power of the ST and emulates the 8088/8086 chip. It transforms your Atari into an IBM compatible, running at 70% of the speed of an IBM when non graphic software is used. It slows to a snails pace when you use graphics software.

In order to run pc-ditto on an ST, you need DOS 3.2 or higher, because only 3.2 or higher supports 3.5 inch micro disks.

Here are some of the features of pc-ditto:

* use of all equivalent keys on the Atari keyboard
* up to 703K of memory
* Atari parallel port =LPT1
* Atari serial port = COM1
* use of 3.5 inch drives for software and data storage in both 40- and 720K high capacity 80-track formats
* use of a 5.25 inch disk drive for reading and writing all standard IBM PC-DOS format disks
* 80 column monochrome video mode on a colour monitor
* colour graphics modes for text and low-, medium-, and high-resolution grahics
* All DOS and BIOS interrupts
* direct read and write to video memory
* direct control of all special chips, such as video, interrupts, disk, serial, and parallel

Pc-ditto allows you to run memory resident programs such as Sidekick and Deskteam. I have also seen Word, Wordperfect, Framework, Dbase III +, Norton utilities and Xtalk run, using pc-ditto.

MORE NOTES

(excuse the pun) REGARDING MY SEARCH FOR THE MOTHERLODE AND/OR MIDI PROGRAMS.

by Bill Hart.

The search goes on. Since my last article in this Newsletter regarding MIDI, your tireless sleuth has spent many hours tracking down various different MIDI programs.

Most of my time has been spent fidgeting with MIDISOFT STUDIO Ver 2.10. I have written tracks. I have transcribed from music a few tracks and I have recorded a few tracks and have come to the conclusion that MIDISOFT STUDIO is a weak program lacking some of the basic requirements that the average amateur musician requires. For instance, if you make a mistake and punch in a a wrong note, you can only correct it IF you catch it before you move on to the next note. Otherwise the mistake is next to impossible to undo. That was not the only weak spot but it sure was the most aggravating. I mean, I blunder through life like a cross-eyed buffalo with dyslexia and mistakes are what I make more of than anything else. I can't tolerate a system that won't allow me to undo my mistakes.

I spent some considerable amount of time at what is probably the largest retailer of MIDI programs in Vancouver. I was panting on their doorstep when they opened up the front door at 9.30 AM. The first thing the store manager did was to phone the Midi department manager to get him out of bed and plead with him to "please" come to work because there was a customer (me) waiting to see him. By 11:30 AM he had still not arrived. I had spent the whole of the intervening time working with DR.TEE's keyboard sequencer, attempting to get the scoring program to work and had by then given the whole thing up as indigestible.

At this point I left and went to another MIDI retailer. This outfit is supposed to be the second largest dealer in Vancouver and might well have been if only they had some MIDI programs. The prices on their non-exsistent stock were better, however, and they sure knew how to talk up a storm about every program you could imagine.

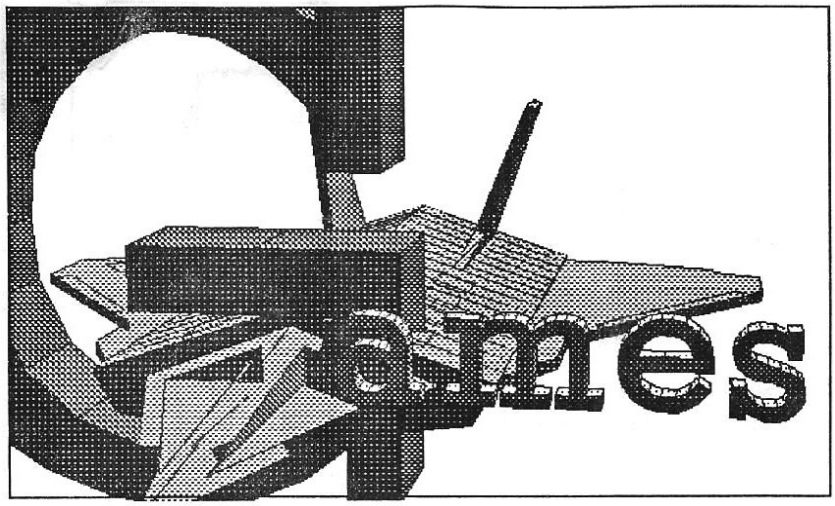
The next day saw me attending a MIDI seminar (all day) at the YAMAHA ELECTRONIC KEYBOARD DIV. in Richmond, for Yamaha Dealers. (It helps to be married to the right people) [Bill is married to a Yamaha instructor] I Probably learned more about MIDI in a few hours than I would have learned after months of reading or fumbling with keyboards.

I had a chance to do a little trouble-shooting too.

Today my lucky star was glistening as bright as usual and a copy of "The Final Cut" produced by Legend Software of Edmonton dropped into my gummy mitts long enough for me to experiment with it for a while. This is a factory copy and not for public circulation; it still has a few exasperating glitches but I think we have a winner. It is MUCH more versatile than anything else I have seen so far. Copies for public use should be on the market within the next few weeks and will sell for around $135.00 . So hang in there all you budding Paderewskis and Rachmaninoffs. "If music be the staff of life, then jack yer 1040 and get doooooooooown, man." (Shakespere)

VERY FAST DBASIC

DTACK Grounded Inc. of 1570 Pacheco B-7, Santa Fe, NM 87504 have come up with an unusual marketing technic. They have send us (actually they send it to Big Blue & Cousin, and Joe Carr forwarded to us) a master disk of their program, DBASIC and a sheet of title stickers. We are free to copy this software and distribute it to our members, provided we stick one of their stickers on the disk. The catch is that unless you have the manual, you probably won't get very far. If you are interested you can obtain a copy from our librarian Bob Furber.



PHANTASIE II

This multiple-character, role-playing game from Strategic Simulations is a sequel to *Phantasie*, previously released for the Commodore 64 and Aplle II-series computers. It's a classic adventure game in the tradition of the *Ultima* series from Origin, *Temple of Aphsai* from Epyx, and *Telengard* from Avalon Hill. As with all games of this type, strength, cunning and magic, play an integral role as you guide your little band in a quest for victory and justice.

Phantasie II makes use of the ST's fine graphics. The program displays a highly detailed picture when you enter a town and at certain other times. Don't expect a lot of dazzling graphics, however. Graphics don't play an important part in this type of game. ($40US)

George Miller

KING'S QUEST III and SPACE QUEST

Space Quest and *King's Quest* by Sierra On-Line employ both text and graphics, and each element plays a mayor role. In both games you guide a character in the story through various screens using the mouise controller or the keyboard. At any time, you can type in the sort of command that are typical of text adventures.

In *Space Quest*, you are a janitor aboard a spacelab, your mission is basically to save your world. You are a native of Earnon, a planet whose sun is about to expire.

In *King's Quest III* you are Gwydion, a sorcerer's lowly slave. Your main goal is to obtain your freedom from Manannan, the evil wizard.

Both games are very attractive to look at and are fun to play. ($50US each)

Neil Randall

STARGLIDER

Starglider is one of the best action games I've seen for the ST.

Starglider is essentially a shoot-em-up flight simulator. Using the mouse, you steer a spaceship that can climb, dive, bank left, and bank right. The left mouse button fires the laser. Velocity is controlled by the right.

The graphics, the sound, and the game play are all of the highest quality. If you are looking for a good arcade-type action game for the ST, I wouldn't hesitate to recommend Starglider. It's top notch .

Todd Heimarck

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SYLVIA"S CORNER

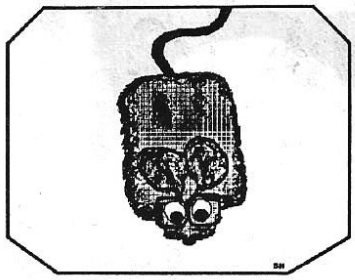
by Sylvia Hanna

Hi!. Well, it's August already and the summer is half over. I don't know where the time is going.

Would you like a real neat pad for your mouse? Maybe you would if you could have one for around $2.00 eh? I made my mouse pad from two placemats which I bought at Save-On-Foods for $1.08 each. I chose two different colours so I can flip it over and have a new looking mat whenever I feel like it.. (Blue and yellow were my choices!) Of course you must buy the kind that are spongy but not made with foam. You glue the two "good" sides facing together which makes the top perfect for the mouse and the underside slip proof for your desktop. They can either be cut if you haven't too much room beside your computer or you can just slip the excess underneath the keyboard and out of sight. I'm really pleased with mine and it suits the Scotch in me too apart from the fact that it LOOKS GREAT as well!

By next issue, or maybe even this one (I haven't seen what John has planned yet) we should be getting more digitized photos. John has a video digitizer now and I have ordered the colour Computer Eyes digitizer. After reading the reviews in the latest magazines I just couldn't resist. They compare the three most popular digitizers and Computer Eyes comes out the winner on all the reviews I've read. Of course it's also by far the most expensive but I have come to realize that even with computer products you seem to get only what you are willing to pay for.

Until the time after the one before next.



NEXT MEETING

Our next meeting will be held on Tuesday, September, 1st, 1987. It will be at the Saanich Library from 7:00 pm to 9:00 pm.

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